



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

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ICE, NORTH COUNTY TASK FORCE TARGET SAN DIEGO GANGS *Criminal alien gang members from Mexico, Guatemala, and Trinidad arrested*

SAN DIEGO –In its most extensive local crackdown on violent gangs yet, U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents have arrested 45 reputed gang members and their associates in northern San Diego County.

The five-week enforcement operation, which began in October, targeted foreign nationals with alleged ties to violent street gangs in Escondido, Oceanside, Vista, and Carlsbad.

Working with officers from the multi-agency North County Regional Gang Task Force, ICE agents arrested foreign nationals linked to street gangs notorious for drug dealing, street violence, and ties to the prison-based Mexican Mafia. Most of the gangs targeted in the operation have more than 100 members and officials estimate 15 percent of those members are foreign nationals.

“Street gangs are a breeding ground for crime and violence and they pose a serious threat to communities,” said Michael Unzueta, San Diego ICE acting special-agent-in-charge for investigations. “Immigration law is one of the powerful tools ICE brings to bear against this threat and we’re going to use it.”

All of those arrested during this latest operation, including two women with gang ties, are from Mexico and Guatemala. Their criminal histories, which make them subject to deportation, include past convictions for rape, child abduction, burglary, theft, and possession and sale of narcotics.

Most of those taken into custody were located at their homes or at the homes of their associates. Agents found one man hiding inside a clothes dryer. A loaded 9 mm semiautomatic handgun was found by agents in a baby crib next to the bed of one 30-year-old gang member. He is now in state custody on drug charges.

In Escondido, agents arrested a south Los Angeles gang member who happened to be in the area. One United States citizen was taken into custody after agents discovered he was wanted on an outstanding warrant for drug charges.

Two of the individuals arrested during the operation is facing federal prosecution for illegally re-entering the United States after deportation. The remaining foreign nationals have been placed in administrative immigration removal proceedings.

Locally, ICE's gang enforcement efforts are led by members of the agency's criminal alien street team whose mission is to get foreign nationals with serious arrest records off the streets. In 2004, ICE agents in San Diego apprehended 526 criminal aliens, including more than 100 gang members and associates.

ICE agents and deportation officers were assisted in this latest operation by officers from the U.S. Marshals Service, Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the California Department of Corrections Parole Division, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, the San Diego Probation Department, and the Escondido, Oceanside, and Carlsbad police departments.

To report suspicious criminal activity, the public is encouraged to call ICE's toll free tip line at 1-886-DHS-2ICE.

Editor's Note: Video footage taken by ICE agents during this latest gang crackdown is available by contacting Channel 10 News at (619) 237- 6381.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.